

JOURNAL

OF THE

ASIATIC SOCIETY.

Part I.—HISTORY, LITERATURE, &c.

No. II.—1872.

The Legend of Bághesar, a deified spirit held in great reverence by the Kúsrú, Súri, Markám, Netiá, and Sársún clans of the Gond Tribe.—
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Once upon a time, in a family of the Gond tribe, there were five brothers, named respectively Kúsrú, Súri, Markám, Netiá, and Sársún.

On the first occasion on which Kúsrú's wife was pregnant, she brought forth a male child; but on the second occasion she gave birth to a tiger's whelp. This young cub was treated by its parents with as much affection and regard as their first-born; and the superior nursing it received, had such a powerful effect on its growth and constitution, that in a few months it grew up to be the finest child of its age and kind that ever was known. From childhood he was the constant companion of Kúsrú, never forsaking his side for a moment; and so great was the filial attachment he bore towards his unnatural parent, that, to this day it is said in praise of him, he was never known to have injured Kúsrú in any way. To the Gond mind no doubt this was a most remarkable trait of character; for what is the experience of their lives from day to day, but that of the strong lording it over the weak.

Kúsrú, whose occupation was husbandry, had taken to tilling jungle lands near his village, and during such time as there were crops in the ground, he used to spend the greater portion of it in watching them. But at one time it so happened that for some days past he had been less vigilant than usual, and the *nílgái* and *sámbar*, making the best of the opportunity, well-nigh ruined the crop and Kúsrú's prospects. However, it was better to save what remained than lose all, thought Kúsrú philosophically; so he

huddled himself close by the field, and night and day watched without ceasing. Weary days and nights were those for Kúsrú, and little wonder was it that—

‘ One beautiful night
When the stars shone bright’

Kúsrú’s head went nid-nid-nodding, and his eyes, sore and weary from watching, dropped the curtains and went to sleep. But whilst he slept, the young cub watching, saw a trespasser approach. So placing his paw gently on Kúsrú’s shoulder, he roused him from sleep, and by signs and gestures drew his attention to a noble looking sámbar, who was making himself at home amongst the young and tender úrid plants.

Kúsrú, however, instead of being quickened to action by the sight, fell into a desponding state; and tearing his hair and bemoaning his ill-fortune, sunk to the ground and cried aloud, ‘ Oh, that mine enemy might be swallowed up!’ The young cub, moved by this despairing and touching appeal, instantly crouched and sprung upon the deer, which it killed and tore to pieces; making emphatically no bones about the matter. And so from day to day, till the crop was gathered, the young cub watched and slew, and thus saved Kúsrú’s field from further injury.

For this great act of deliverance, Kúsrú began to love the young cub as he never before had loved him, with a love in fact that was little short of idolatry. But Kúsrú had at length to experience the bitter truism that ‘ all flesh is but as dust;’ for, alas, a day came—‘ the long, long, weary day’ of Kúsrú’s existence—when the young tiger departed this life and gave up the ghost. In other words he died and became a *bhút*!

Kúsrú was inconsolable, and his wife by no means improved matters by presenting him at such a time with an addition to the family in the shape of a daughter. If she had only kept up the tiger progeny, she might possibly have helped thereby to fill up that aching void which was gnawing at Kúsrú’s gizzard. He ate not—he slept not; and how life was sustained during the following space of ten or twelve years, we are not informed.

Tradition, not to be burdened with such trifles, hurries us on to the period when Kúsrú’s daughter had matured into a plump and buxom lass, and veiled and decked as a bride in turmeric-stained garments, looking as fine as a carrot fresh-scraped, we find her seated with a bridegroom at her side under a leafy marriage-bower, which has been erected for the occasion within her father’s court-yard. Kinsmen and acquaintances from far and near have come in holiday attire to offer their congratulations and enjoy the fun, and are to be seen crowding round the *marwá*, or bower, with joyful faces and sparkling eyes. Even Kúsrú, forgetful of his old sorrows, is determined to make merry with the rest, and is to be seen urging the drummers and pipers to increased

exertion, as if in all conscience they were not making enough din and noise already. But the time and occasion perhaps require it.

The ceremony is at a close, and the nuptial knot has been tied. Three hours have passed in tedious rites and ceremonies. The happy couple with the bride's-maids and best man have all been kissed and marked with the sacred symbols times out of number, first by one relation and then by another. The bride and bridegroom with their garments knotted together have, with mincing steps, slowly and wearily crept seven times round the *bhaunra*, or branch, which forms the central support to the bower. The rice given in dowry has been measured out to the same mystical number of seven times. Everything, in short, has been done that ought to have been done, and the wedded couple are now about to retire within the house, whilst the spectators withdraw to the green outside to dance, sing, and make merry.

But the attention of every one present is suddenly arrested by fiendish yells and roars.

"What is it? Who is it?" is the anxious enquiry of every one as the words pass from mouth to mouth with wind-like rapidity. With quivering accents and bated breath the answer comes speedily back, that one of the company has become (demoniacally) possessed with a demon. A thrill of mingled terror and dismay ran through the whole party at the sudden news of so untoward an event, for

"When the sun sets, who doth not look for night?"

The most civilized community on earth could not fail, on a similarly joyful occasion of their own, to be overcome with, at least, a sense of gloom, if one of their number on the spot went suddenly mad or hysterical. But amongst a people naturally superstitious, and that to a degree almost incredible, the circumstance before alluded to had a wider and deeper significance than anything we can possibly imagine.

Falling into the midst of the company, the individual possessed is dashing his body about on the ground; up and down; right and left; driving the lookers on from post to pillar, and from pillar to post; and, by his wild and fiendish actions, striking consternation and terror into the hearts of all; for a visitation of this sort had never on such an occasion been known before.

Kúsrá's spirits went down with a run, and looking as grave as a judge, he implored the Baigá, or village priest and necromancer, to divine whose spirit this was, and for what purpose it had come.

Forthwith the Baigá, with an air of authority worthy of an exorcist, interrogates the spirit, saying—

Speak ! speak ! thou fearful guest !
 Whose spirit haunts thy breast ?*
 Why thus as one possessed
 Como yo to daunt me ?

Amidst a breathless silence, the demoniac giving the wretched Kúsrú a piercing look of recognition, informs him and his terror-stricken guests in a voice peculiar to gnomes, bogies, goblins, and such like fry,

I was a tiger bold !
 My deeds, though manifold,
 No Gond hath yet extolled,
For this I sought thee.

Kúsrú is thunder-struck, and the company in dumb show betoken bewilderment, whilst the restless and impatient spirit roars, ‘Worship me with offerings and sacrifices.’

A fowl was immediately fetched for the purpose of being offered up in the orthodox fashion ; but the spirit evinced such unmistakeable signs of dissatisfaction at the very sight of this familiar bird, that a kid was instantly brought to be sacrificed in its stead. As soon as the demoniac espied that animal, he sprang at it after the fashion of a tiger, and, seizing it between his teeth, gnawed and tore it to death.

Kúsrú’s joy at this sight was unspeakable ; for there was a something in the killing way in which the demoniac went to work that revealed to him beyond a doubt, that the spirit present was of a truth no other than that of his favourite tiger-son. So he brought out a pot of the last home-brew, and some of the finest and purest ghí which his store contained wherewith to treat his welcome guest.

Three leaf-eupfuls of the former were poured down the demoniac’s throat and a handful of ghí forced into his mouth, whereupon the spirit being satisfied went out of the man, and took its departure for the shades below, leaving Kúsrú dilated with joy, but the company *en masse* in grave doubt as to the light in which this apparently unwarrantable intrusion ought to be regarded.

But they soon received the assurance of Kúsrú and the Baigá that this little novelty which had so alarmed every one at the first was the happiest omen possible. So from that day forth, the spirit of Kúsrú’s tiger-son was deified and worshipped under the name of Bághesar by the five Gond clans descended from, and respectively named after, the brothers Kúsrú, Súrú, Markám, Netia, and Sarsún.

* “Speak ! speak ! thou fearful guest !

“Who with thy hollow breast, &c.”

Longfellow’s *Skeleton in Armour.*

The substance of the above was told me by a Gond of the Kúsrú clan, at the marriage of whose daughter I was present; and it was then that I witnessed the pranks of the demon Bágghesar from which I was led to make enquiry as to his antecedents.

It is only at the marriages of members of the five clans, who are named in the heading to this paper, that Bágghesar manifests his presence in the manner narrated in the story. With them he is held in reverence as a *deified* spirit; but with other Gonds, Bágghesar is simply one of the many spirits to whom propitiatory offerings are yearly made. According to the latter he has no such origin as that ascribed to him by the five clans before-mentioned, but is simply regarded as 'the concentrated essence of spirits', which have issued from those Gonds who have met their deaths by tigers; for, according to local belief, the spirits of all Gonds thus killed, are said to unite and form the one great spirit Bágghesar; and it is simply with a view to saving their flocks and herds, and their own lives also, from the ravages of tigers that the inhabitants of every Gond village yearly make offerings to propitiate this demon. And to this extent I find the same spirit is known and propitiated by the people of these wild parts generally.

At the marriage ceremony which I witnessed, Bágghesar entered into and possessed two men. One was the *pujári* or priest, and the other a looker on. The *pujári* is always told off specially for this duty, in case none of the company should happen to get involuntarily possessed. A woman, on the occasion referred to, was also taken worse, but got quickly bundled out of the way from motives of public decency.

The manner in which the two men seized the kid between their teeth and by that means killed it, was a sight which could only be equalled in a zoological garden or menagerie on feeding days.

But this exhibition of fiend-like butchery is only allowed to be partially witnessed, for, as soon as the kid has been fairly pinned, the members of the family who are standing by, throw blankets or cloths over the demoniacs, as they say it is a sight not fit for all eyes to behold; a point which no civilized being would be likely to dispute with them.

The demoniacs I saw, were permitted to exercise their teeth on the kid's carcass some time after it had sounded its last gurgling note: and this indulgence, judging from the motions of the covering cloths, was entered into with an amount of zest and gusto that was positively brutal; and from an orange-sucking sound that was occasionally audible, a horrid suspicion crossed my mind that they had even gone to the extent of blood-sucking, though of this I could not be positive.

The bride's father at length dragged out the mangled and lifeless body of the kid and put it aside; and the men emerging from their covering disported themselves like electrified frogs *à la* Ghámásán, another gentleman

of the infernal regions whose acquaintance I made in these parts, and who throws those whom he possesses into a state suggestive of one attacked simultaneously with hysterics, epilepsy, ague, and colic, a fearful combination, it is true, and to fully realise which, the reader must make a trip to Chang-Bhokár, which, geographically speaking, is one of the Chutiá-Nágpúr Tributary States, but which psychologically, I think, must be one of the outlying provinces of Pandemonium.

The bride's father having treated each of the demoniacs to three cupsful of liquor and a mouthful of ghí, Bághesar's spirit vanished, leaving both the men considerably blown and exhausted.

During the whole of this scene not a soul spoke, and the general impression seemed to be, that it was too solemn a matter to be sneered or laughed at. Still no marriage ceremony is complete without it, and, according to Gond ideas, fortune smiles on the wedded couple when Bághesar appears.

If the bride's parents are poor and have not the means to afford a kid, a pig is given instead. This I should think can't be quite so pleasant for the demoniacs, but the fun no doubt would be considerably enhanced to those lookers-on who, like myself, had nothing to fear from Bághesar, and could therefore with impunity smile at his pranks.

Of the extraordinary nature of the scene in general, no description could ever supply a perfectly accurate conception; but, as an illustration of the superstitious belief and worship of one of the most interesting of the aboriginal tribes of India, it is nevertheless worthy of record.



Essays in aid of a Comparative Grammar of the Gaurian Languages.—By
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I.—*Introductory.*

It may be convenient to have a collective name for all North-Indian languages derived from the Sanskrit. As Dráviḍian is now, after the example set by Dr. Caldwell in his Comparative Grammar of the Dráviḍian languages, the name generally received to designate the non-Sanskritic languages of South India, and as Gaurian (गौड़) is the term commonly used by Sanskrit writers as the correlative to Dráviḍian (द्राविड़), it appears to be the simplest plan to appropriate the term Gaurian for the Sanskritic languages of North India.*

The following languages must be accounted Gaurian: *viz.*, the Oriyá, the Bangáli, the Hindí, the Naipáli, the Maráthí, the Gujarátí, the Sindhí,

* If I am not much mistaken, I have already seen the word Gaurian employed by some writers in this wise, so that its use by me is not a novelty.